

Pif Paf Patapan!

A Sampler of Phonetic Poetry from the 19th Century



Francis Vielé-Griffin
Paul Verlaine
Charles Nodier
Théophile Gautier

ed. Olchar E. Lindsann

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Forward

Though Phonetic Poetry as a designated, focused practice was developed in the early years of the 20th Century, experiments with phonetics and non-semantic sound have been explored in the avant-garde since at least 1830. These explorations were multiform: Nodier and Gautier writing pure sound poems in the 1830s, Vielé-Griffin applying the synthetic language Volapük fifty years later, and Verlaine playing with experimental orthography around the same time.

These are the poets who were read by the Futurists, Dadas, and Zoumists, and whose experiments (and others'?) they consolidated into a new form. Indeed, not only literary influence but an unbroken network of personal friendships and collective projects connects all of the poets here with most of those who later established sound poetry; phonetic play was always a consistent part of the avant-garde *lifestyle*.

Charles Nodier was a seminal figure in the founding of the avant-garde. His 1830 experimental novel *The Seven Castles of the King of Bohemia* contains not only the phonetic poem here (built largely from onomatopoeia, of which Nodier had compiled a dictionary), but also stunning visual, typographical, pictographic, and list-poems.

Théophile Gautier was a disciple of Nodier, and his short simultaneous sound poem here, published three years later, directly references his mentor's poem in its first line. It appeared in *The Jeunesse-France*, his 1833 roman-à-clef about life in the underground Romanticist community in Paris, where it is improvised by the group in a self-induced state of hallucinatory frenzy.

The Franco-American Symbolist **Francis Vielé-Griffin**, a close friend of Mallarmé and Jarry, wrote several poems in the recently-invented language of Volapük, a precursor of Esperanto. He was also among the first, in 1890, to predict the poetic use of manipulated sound in recorded poetry.

Paul Verlaine was a close friend both with the older Gautier and the younger Vielé-Griffin, and almost certainly familiar with all of the texts in this book. In "To A. Duvigneaux," he satirizes (continuing) debates about changing French orthography to a more phonetic system. He teases out rifts between written and voiced language that presage scoring techniques for much sound poetry today.

More examples may exist, forgotten in rotting books and journals.

These poems should be read aloud.

Invention

Pif paf piaf patapan.
Ouhiyins ouhiyins. Ebrohé broha broha, Ouhiyins ouhiyins.
Hoé hu. Dia hurau. Tza tza tza.
Cla cla cla. Vli wlan. Flic flam. Flaflaflac.
Tza tza tza. Psi psi psi. Ouistle.
Zou lou lou. Rlurlurlu. Ouistle,
Cla cla cla. Flaflaflac.
Ta ta ta. Ta ta ta. Pouf.
Ouhiyins. Ebrohé broha. Ouhiyins ouhiyins.
Ta ta—ta ta—ta ta—ta ta—hup.
A u ho. Tza tza tza. O hem. O hup. O war!
Trrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. Hup. O hep. O hup. O hem. Hap!
Trrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. O hup. O hé. O halt! O! Oooooh!
Xi xi xi! Pic! Pan! Baoûnd.
Hourra!!!!!!!

Charles Nodier, 1830

Nodier's interpretation of the poem: "...this page, entirely unique among all the written monuments of language, hides, beneath the appearance of a simple witticism, the strongest effort of creative imagination; the secret of the *Novum organum*¹ and the *Characteristic*; the universal intelligence that the kantists, ecclesiastics and pundits, so in love with clarity, still seek gropingly!" He goes on to explain the onomatopoeia line by line, in relation to an implied narrative.

from Charles Nodier, *Les Sept Châteaux du roi de bohème / Les Quatre talismans*. (1852). Victor Lecou, Paris.

Original publication was in 1830

1 Francis Bacon's book proposing a new form of logic.

Untitled extract from *Les Jeunes-France*

Pan, pan!	Frou, frou.
Glin, glin!	Clac!
Brr...	Aie, aie!
Humph!	Ah!
Fi!	Oh!
Euh, heu...	Paf!
<i>Pouah!</i>	<i>Ouf!</i>

by Théophile Gautier, 1833

from *Les Jeunes-France: romans goguenards*. 1885. Charpentier,
Paris.

Original publication was in 1833

Soladel

Stals vamik sola de plum
Vietoms vatis de flum
E faloms flamik as tum
Sagits Lofapula!

On âklôdom-ôv das fel
Binom logad: lino, Spel
Ekômom svidik as smel
Flolas ets lulula

Apozendelo, Bied,
Te² mens dotik ê to ned,
Svidom oki: ba poed
Obinom fam ola.

Stalol-ôd egelo, Sol!
Lifol-ôd, tikal, sus dol,
E spunôl rimis ko mol
In gad molik vola!

by Aleric Thome (Francis Vielé-Griffin), 1886

from *Lutèce*, Vol. 5, No. 225. March 3, 1886. Paris.

Republished with revision in

Entretiens Politiques et Littéraire, Vol. 1, No. 1. April 1, 1890.

2 The original version in *Lutèce* reads "To." I have retained "Te" from the later 1890 publication in *Entretiens*, edited by Vielé-Griffin himself, which I have treated as definitive.

Volapük Fragments

Alina das näito, Mun,
Desipol oba tikâli.
Oblekôle kaladâli,
Bludom del of a nedan vun.

Polü nâta del fatela
Cils ekômoms lôbo zi bed;
Fukel omsik edlemom, yed
Epukôms vips nâtadela.

“Binols-od gudik, cils gâla,”
Sagom bâledan,” dat, füdo,
Got omes cils givom-la, do
Man etos no melidom-la!

Bal kid gôlodom alimi
Ko givs jônik demü promels;
O cils, eko galods pos sets:
Pledols-ob; epükols plimi.

Flutakim kanitom in fot;
Vôg nata tugonom as vin;
Eko zulul dolik ko vot
Bledas—zusüdom yelafin!

Viens voboms ya lunu doms;
Del palunom as litapol;
Ya rabs poboms e pâbs tevoms.
Lulul nulik, kiop fügol?
. ! ! Rabs poboms e pâbs tevoms!

by “Toussaint-des-Mornes” (Francis Vielé-Griffin), 1890

from *Entretiens politiques et littéraires*. Year 1, No. 1, April 1890. ed. Paul Adam & Francis Vielé-Griffin. Librairie de l'art indépendant: Paris.

À A. Duvigneaux

Too ardent opponent to Phonetic Orthography³

¶ coi vréman, bon Duvignô, □

Vou zôci dou ke lé zagnô □

É meïeur ke le pin con manj, □

Vou metr'an ce courou zétranj

Contr (e) cē tâ de brav (e) jan □

O fon plus bête ke méchan □

Drapan leur linguistic étic □

Dan l'ortograf (e) fonétic?

Kel ir (e) donc vou zambala? □

Vizavi de cé zoizola □

Sufi d'une parol (e) verde.

Et pour leur prouyé sans déba □

Kil é dé mô ke n'atin pa □

Leur sistem (e), dizon leur:! ⁴

by Paul Verlaine, 1891.

from Paul Verlaine, *Dédicaces: Nouvelle édition augmentée*. 1894. Léon Vanier: Paris.

First published in an unidentified issue of *Chat Noir*, 1891.

3 No other trace seems to exist of the dedicatee, unless he was a certain André Maurice Duvigneaux who died the year of the poem's publication, about which nothing else seems to be known; more likely, the name is invented.

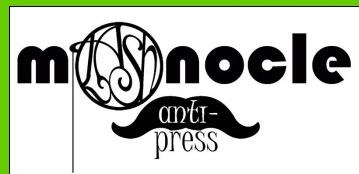
4 The missing word is generally assumed to be “merde,” or “shit.” The paired rhyme “verde” does not exist in French.

The Gautier, Vielé-Griffin, and Verlaine poems can be found online in digitizations of the books listed, all at Gallica.bnf.fr

Although the Verlaine poem is reprinted in numerous collections of his work, some suppress the stanza-breaks; this text is drawn from the 1891 corrected edition prepared by Verlaine himself. Nodier's *Roi du Bohême* cannot be found online, but the original 1830 edition is available in facsimile reprints & some academic libraries.

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